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The Battle of Good and Evil in The Picture of
Dorian Gray

B.A Essay
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Abstract

The Picture of Dorian Gray is the only novel published by Oscar Wilde. The novel is considered to be one of the most controversial literary works of the 19th century. In his novel Wilde uses his three main characters to reflect the battle of good and evil that exists in every man. The conflict of choosing between good and evil exists in every human with free will. This essay explores how the battle between good and evil is represented in the characters of Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. It also discusses how Dorian Gray represents the everyman that deals with the battle of having to choose a side between good and evil. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a story about the spiritual journey of Dorian Gray, a beautiful young man tempted by the concept of eternal youth and beauty.

Wilde uses personal experience and different literary themes to create his novel. In the novel there are elements of gothic fiction, aestheticism and the Faustian bargain. *Faust* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* have many similarities, both in the structure of the stories, as well as in themes and plot. This essay looks at the similarities and differences between the corresponding representatives of good and evil, Lord Henry and Mephistopheles, Basil, the Lord and the three angels and Dorian Gray and Faust. This essay explores how Wilde uses the similarities and differences to Goethe's *Faust* and the Book of Genesis from the Old Testament to add emphasis to the moral opposites of good and evil in his novel.

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Introduction

According to the *Bible* When God created the world he made everything in pairs and doubles, the doubles are opposites that counteract each other. The opposite this essay will mainly focus on is the opposites of good and evil. The battle between good and evil exists in every human with freewill.

In his first and only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, author Oscar Wilde uses his main character, Dorian, to represent the everyman who faces the dilemma of having to take a side of either good or evil. Evil forces tempt Dorian and a battle begins between good and evil over Dorian's soul. Wilde uses the characters in the novel to represent the battle. Wilde was influenced by Goethe's play *Faust*, this essay explores the similarities and differences between the corresponding representatives of good and evil, Lord Henry and Mephistopheles, Basil, the Lord and the three angels and Dorian Gray and Faust. *Faust* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* have many similarities, both in the structure of the stories, as well as in themes and plot. The characters correspond with each other, not only in personality and actions but also their relationships. Faust and Dorian both suffer from the great desire of wanting more than life has to offer. Without fully realising the consequences, they both go beyond human limitations to try and fulfil their wishes. Both stories represent the battle between good and evil, they can be looked at as cautionary tales of what can happen if a person yields to the temptation of evil and proving that happiness is not found in beauty or pleasure.

This essay focuses on how the forces of good and evil are presented in the opposites of Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and how Dorian Gray represents the everyman that deals with the battle of having to pick a side between good and evil. It aims to prove that Wilde uses allusions to the Book of Genesis and *Faust* to add emphasis on the moral opposition of good and evil.

Chapter 1 Background

1.1 Oscar Wilde

Oscar Wilde was born on the 16th of October 1845 in Dublin, Ireland. He studied at Trinity College Dublin and later at Magdalen College in Oxford. After his studies he resided in London. Wilde wrote short stories, poems and plays. He worked at a journal and travelled on a lecture tour to America. In 1891 he published his first and only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. When *The Picture of Dorian Gray* first came out as a serial story in *Lippincott's Magazine* in 1890, the editors found parts of the story to be indecent and too controversial for publishing. They took it upon themselves to edit the story and published their revised version, without Oscar Wilde's knowledge (Kohl 138-142).

Despite the revision by editors, the story was still considered indecent for the time. The novel was not well received by critics or the public, and did not follow the traditional 19th century literary style. The novel was cast as an immoral book because it displayed homosexual aspects. Wilde wrote about the life of the middle class and new hedonism, straying away from the dominant literary style of the Victorian Era. Wilde defended his work and published a full edition with an added preface in 1891. The preface is about the purpose of art, the role of the artist and the reader. In 1895, Wilde was sentenced to two years in prison for homosexuality. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was used as evidence against him in court. After he got out of prison he moved to France, where he died of meningitis on November 30, 1900. Oscar Wilde remains one of the greatest writers of the 19th century. Still to this day his work is being printed and read. He has become even more famous for his quotations. He is not only known for his work and publications but also for his personal life (Kohl 138 – 139; *Encyclopædia Britannica* | 'Oscar Wilde'.)

1.2 The Picture of Dorian Gray: Summary

The Picture of Dorian Gray begins on a beautiful summer's day in Victorian England. The artist Basil Hallward is putting the finishing touches on his portrait of a young beautiful man. His friend Lord Henry is admiring the beauty of the man. Basil does not care for Lord Henry to meet Dorian, he knows that Henry can have bad influence on the young man. Henry poisons Dorian's mind with hedonistic ideas and conception on the importance of beauty. Knowing that he will never be as young or as beautiful as the portrait, Dorian wishes that he will remain the same and the portrait will age.

Dorian meets Sibyl Vane, an actress, who he falls in love with and they become engaged. Henry and Basil join Dorian to go see Sibyl perform at the theatre; her performance is so terrible that Dorian becomes ashamed of her and breaks off the engagement. That night Dorian comes home and notices a change in his portrait; it now shows marks of cruelty that do not appear on Dorian. The day after, Dorian plans to visit Sybil and hopes to restore their relationship. He learns that Sibyl was extremely heartbroken and took her own life. Lord Henry makes no fuss over Sybil's death and encourages Dorian to move on and forget it ever happened. Henry gives Dorian a yellow book about hedonistic lifestyle that will consume his life for the next 18 years. Dorian's lifestyle is now the talk of the town, he lives a careless and guilt free life. The portrait is almost unrecognizable and Dorian moves it to the attic where no one can see it. Basil has not seen Dorian for a very long time, he is concerned about the rumours he has been hearing about Dorian, and he is shocked and afraid when Dorian shows him the corrupt portrait. Dorian becomes angry and murders Basil, thus breaking one of God's commandments: Thou Shalt not Kill (Exodus 20:13). Dorian realises how corrupted he has become and decides that he wants to change and start a new chapter in his life. Therefore he decides to destroy the portrait. A loud cry is heard from his room and the servants run to see what has happened. On the floor they find the body of a dead man, Dorian, old, withered and wrinkled, lying in front of a portrait of a young and beautiful Dorian Gray.

1.3 The Legend of Faust

Faust, also known as Faustus or Doctor Faustus, is a character in books, poems, films, operas and plays. These different versions of Faust are all based on one of the most durable legends in Western folklore and literature. Faust was a German necromancer or astrologer who in exchange for knowledge and power sold his soul to the Devil. Mephistopheles is the spirit of the Devil in *Faust* (*Encyclopædia Britannica* | Faust). Many authors have based their work on the legend of Faust and it has become somewhat of a theme in literature. The act of selling one's soul to the Devil has become known as the Faustian Bargain or Faustian Pact. Not all stories of Faust have the same ending. The legend of Faust is based on one or two men who died around the year 1540. Not much is known about him or them, except an evil reputation (*Encyclopædia Britannica* | 'Faust Literary Character').

The story of Faust has become the prototype for the “pact with the Devil” theme in literature, however The Book of Job contains a pact with the Devil, although it is not quite the same as in *Faust*. The theme of the Book of Job is the eternal problem of unmerited suffering and it is named after its main character, Job. The Book of Job questions if God is good and almighty why would he do bad things to his loyal servants. Similar to *Faust*, The Book of Job includes a prologue in Heaven, a conversation between God and Satan. God is very pleased with Job and He asks Satan his opinion on Job. Satan says that the only reason Job is such a loyal servant to him, is because God has blessed Job with so much. Satan and God then make a deal, Satan can punish Job and try to turn him from God and test his faith. God believes that Job will remain a good servant. This is very similar to the conversation and pact between the Lord and Mephistopheles in *Faust*, which also takes place in heaven. Both Faust and Dorian make a pact with the Devil. In Job's case the pact was made between God and Satan, Job did not know or understand why all these bad things were happening to him. Dorian and Faust may not have realised the bad consequences of their pact. Job can be looked at as a fable, an example of how his faith and goodness is rewarded by God. While

Faust and Dorian Gray are cautionary tales of what can come from making a pact with the devil (Bible Study Tools | The Book of Job).

1.4 Goethe and His Version of *Faust*

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was born on August 28 1749 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. He was a playwright, poet, novelist, scientist, statesman, director, critic and amateur artist. He spent most of his adult life working on *Faust* (*Encyclopædia Britannica* | Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe). This play was published in two parts, the first in 1808 and the second in 1832 after the author's death. It is considered by some to be Germany's greatest contribution to world literature (*Encyclopædia Britannica* | 'Faust Play By Goethe'). Goethe died in Weimar, Germany, on March 22, 1832 (*Encyclopædia Britannica* | Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe). According to Richard Ellmann, there is evidence that suggests that Oscar Wilde was influenced by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's play, *Faust* (293).

The first part of Goethe's Faust opens up in Heaven where the three angels, Raphael, Gabriel and Michael praise the Lord for his creations. Mephistopheles, the Devil, does not worship or praise the Lord, but instead complains about the current state of the world. The Lord and Mephistopheles make a bet over one of the servants on earth, Faust. Mephistopheles believes that Faust will turn away from The Lord and the Lord is assured that Faust will remain a good and faithful servant to Him. The Lord is so very convinced that he gives Mephistopheles permission to try all he can to turn Faust and lead him onto a corrupt path.

*Faust is a German scholar and alchemist. He has studied his whole life and still he is in despair because he feels that his life is unfulfilled, he wants more from life. Faust feels lost and unhappy and starts thinking of unconventional methods to try to better his life. Faust hopes to gain infinite knowledge and power (*Encyclopædia Britannica* | 'Faust Play By Goethe'). He is interrupted while reading by a barking dog, which transforms into Mephistopheles. Faust and Mephistopheles make a pact. The Devil will grant Faust's every wish while on earth and in exchange Faust will serve the Devil in*

hell. Faust signs the arrangement with a drop of his own blood. Mephistopheles takes Faust on a journey, first to a drinking tavern and later to a witch's cave. Faust meets and falls in love with a woman named Margaret, also called Gretchen. Gretchen and her mother are faithful Christians and Faust assures her that he is as well; however she does not quite believe him and worries about her mother's opinion. Faust convinces Gretchen to allow him to give her mother a potion to make her fall asleep. Faust seduces Gretchen and the pair consummates their relationship. Gretchen learns that she has become pregnant and is afraid of her future and fears damnation for her sin. Her fear drives her to kill their child and for that she is arrested and imprisoned. Faust goes to the jail and finds Gretchen. He hopes to convince her to run away with him; however her guilt and fear of damnation force her to stay. Faust and Mephistopheles go away and leave Gretchen. She has surrendered herself to be judged by God (Goethe). The second part of the tragedy "covers Faust's life at court, the wooing and winning of Helen of Troy, and his purification and salvation" (Encyclopædia Britannica 'Faust Play By Goethe').

1.5 The Book of Genesis

The Old Testament contains the first 39 books of the Christian *Bible*. The book of Genesis is the first book of the Old Testament and its stories provide further understanding for the rest of the *Bible*. It starts with the story of creation, how God created the world. God creates the world and divides it into doubles and opposites, the sun and the moon, light and dark, man and woman, sin and redemption and more. God spends six days creating the world and after each day he saw each of his creations as good (Bible Study Tools |Books of the Bible). The first words of Genesis are: "In The beginning" (Genesis 1:1). The Book of Genesis is the story of the beginning of the earth and all of God's creations, as well as the beginning of human knowledge of good and evil, which began in Eden. Good and evil is the most common binary opposite in not only the Book of Genesis but also affects the world we live in today.

God created the man and the woman, Adam and Eve, and placed them in a garden that He named Eden. In the middle of Eden grew the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2.7-2.9). God gave Adam and Eve permission to do as they wished in Eden, except he forbid them to eat from the tree of knowledge of

good and evil (Genesis 2:17). In Eden lives the serpent, the craftiest animal of all of God's creation. The serpent manages to convince Eve to eat from the forbidden tree. So she does and gives some to her husband, Adam (Genesis 3:1-3:6). "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever" (Genesis 3:22). God finds out what they have done and punishes Adam and Eve and banishes them from Eden (Genesis 3:16-23).

The battle between good and evil starts in a garden, both for Adam and Eve as well as Dorian, the garden of Eden and the garden at Basil's house. Basil is like God the creator, Dorian acts as the first man so innocent and pure and Lord Henry acts as the serpent. The serpent is the tempter that persuades Eve to eat from the forbidden tree in Eden. The Book of Genesis speaks about relationships, mainly those between God and humankind and between human beings (Bible Study Tools | The Book of Genesis). Wilde uses the relationship between Lord Henry, Basil and Dorian to reflect the battle of good and evil. The relationship of the three characters resembles relationships in the Book of Genesis. Therefore highlighting the contrast of good and evil that the relationship and characters represent.

2. Comparison of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Faust*

The stories of Dorian Gray and Faust share many similarities, especially when it comes to the plot, relationships between the main characters and the characters themselves. The stories also share literary themes; in both works we can find Gothic elements, the double life theme, also known as the doppelganger theme and of course they share the Faustian Bargain. Wilde was influenced by the Faustian theme. He began with a familiar and classic theme in literature, of a young man selling his soul in exchange for eternal youth. He then gave the theme a new form, which came from localizing this theme in the contemporary controversy of art versus life (Ellmann 293). Even though Wilde is using a common theme in literature it is reduced to the simple polarity of aesthetic and hedonistic pleasure versus morality. "Of the metaphysical breadth of Goethe's *Faust* little remains except the basic conflict between good and evil. In *The*

Picture of Dorian Gray Oscar Wilde wrote the Faust that suited him” (Kohl 162). The main focus of both works is the decline of the main character. The fall of innocence for Dorian is symbolized by his infatuation with himself. The fall of Faust is his want for more knowledge than is available for a human. Faust and Dorian both go on a journey of some type. For Faust it is a physical journey and for Dorian it is a spiritual journey.

Dorian and Faust are both men of means and have attained either economic or intellectual freedom, which makes the fall from grace available to them, according to Joyce Carol Oates’s theories (424). Faust has mastered philosophy, medicine and theology and Dorian is a very beautiful young man who inherited money from his grandfather (Magnadóttir 21). Despite that, neither of them is satisfied with what they have. Dorian and Faust both desire more than life has to offer. Their desires are so strong that they are willing to sacrifice their souls for their wishes to be granted. Dorian wishes for eternal beauty and youth while Faust hopes to gain eternal experience and knowledge (Kohl 162).

Faust and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are both divided into two parts. In the first part of *Dorian Gray* the main character wishes for eternal beauty and he meets and falls in love with Sibyl Vane. He also meets Lord Henry and falls under his influence. In the first part of *Faust*, the main character also meets his love, Gretchen and makes his pact with Mephistopheles. In part two of both works Faust and Dorian both go on a bad road that leads to their destruction. Dorian’s love for Sibyl Vane and her tragic end corresponds to the story of Gretchen in the tragedy of *Faust*. Gretchen and Sibyl both fall head over heels in love; however, Faust and Dorian do not return their love. The rejection drives them both to madness and in the end they both take their own lives. James Vane, Sybil’s brother who tries to avenge his sister and dies while trying, has his counterpart in Valentin, Gretchen’s brother who has a similar fate (Kohl 162).

Joyce Carol Oates writes that in *Dorian Gray* the consequences of a Faustian pact with the Devil are “dramatized, but the Devil himself is absent” (424). However, there are many similarities between Mephistopheles and Lord Henry. Faust makes a deal with Mephistopheles and signs a contract with his blood, while Dorian’s wish was an innocent remark made in the company of friends, including Lord Henry. Dorian: “If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that - For that -I would give everything! I would give my soul for that!” (Wilde 17-18). Dorian does not know he is entering into a deal with the Devil. There are no signs of the

wish being granted until later in the novel, the night he breaks off the engagement to Sybil Vane and he notices changes in the portrait (Wilde 58-59).

The Picture of Dorian Gray and *Faust* represent the battle between good and evil, a battle every person encounters in life. Dorian and Faust even mention this divide: “Each of us has heaven and hell in him, Basil” (Wilde 100); “Two souls, alas! Are lodged in my wild breast”. Which evermore-opposing ways endeavour” (Goethe 60). The battle between good and evil in *Dorian Gray* begins when Dorian, Basil and Lord Henry, first meet all together. Henry breaks the promise he made to Basil, not to spoil Dorian and straight away Dorian falls under his influence. The battle in *Faust* begins when the Lord and Mephistopheles make their deal in heaven. In the original version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* there was a passionate and erotic link between Basil Hallward and Dorian Gray. In the revised version, the emphasis falls on Basil’s idealism, his sense of responsibility and his good nature. Wilde stresses the destructive side of Lord Henry – his irresponsibility and his cynicism. That way he shows the reader the clear contrast between Lord Henry and Basil, thereby bringing out the moral alternative that they represent (Kohl 142).

3. The Battle of Good and Evil in *Dorian Gray*

3.1 Dorian: The Everyman

The battle of good and evil exists in every soul. Each person will face the choice between good and evil during a lifetime. Dorian is aware of that it exists in him. He knows he is under the influence of Lord Henry and that Basil is trying to persuade him to remain on a good path. The novel is a story about a spiritual journey for Dorian Gray, his struggle to choose between good and evil. The conflict is made evident to the reader by the oppositions that Basil and Henry represent. “Their principal task is to articulate mutually exclusive moral positions and, in so doing, to define the moral options available to Dorian” (Liebman). Basil and Henry represent the opposite forces of good and evil, in a way they fight over Dorian’s soul. Dorian represents a man who struggles to live his life surrounded by temptation. Dorian is the only character in the novel that faces this decision. Basil and Henry have already chosen a side. Therefore they do not face the choice between good and evil. “They simply demonstrate by their actions the

consequences of thinking and living as they do. In this way, they show the reader (and Dorian) the limitations of their respective positions” (Liebman). Basil and Henry reveal the sacrifice and cost of choosing one position rather than the other. If Dorian had chosen Basil’s moralism, he would not have lived the life of sin that he did. And if he had chosen to adopt Henry’s theories he would never feel remorse or guilt and ask for redemption (Liebman). Dorian is the middleman in the conflict between Basil and Henry. He is unable to deny his guilt and yet he cannot repress his desires. Dorian does not choose a side, he represents the “everyman, whose dilemma is a product of his human endowment” (Liebman). His dilemma is the same as exists in every human.

Dorian notices a difference between Lord Henry and Basil, “He was so unlike Basil. They made a delightful contrast”(Wilde 12 -13). Basil is a middle class man while Lord Henry speaks against middle class values. The Picture of Dorian Gray presents mostly characters that are from the upper classes and have " a great deal of money” (Kohl 139). Basil believes that evil is punished and good is rewarded, Henry does not believe in such a moral order. Basil and Henry are thought by many not only to represent good and evil forces but also a conflict between ethics and aesthetics (Liebman). Basil believes in art over beauty and Lord Henry believes the exact opposite. Lord Henry believes in beauty and pleasure and lives a very hedonistic and aesthetic life. Lord Henry believes that appearances and reputation are everything. As he says: “There is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about” (Wilde 3), and “It mattered to be known. It is only shallow people that do not judge by appearances” (Wilde 15-16). Honour and goodness are more of a priority for Basil. Dorian adapts Henry’s theory on the importance of reputation, his only reason for breaking off the engagement with Sibyl because she has embarrassed him in front of Basil and Lord Henry, by her poor acting. He was afraid her bad acting would reflect on his reputation.

Sibyl’s suicide is a critical point in the novel; it is in that scene that the reader can see Dorian changing. When he first notices a change in the portrait and hears about Sibyl’s death Dorian feels remorse and guilt, he regrets how cruel he was to her. Lord Henry tries to convince Dorian to ignore his guilt and forget that is happened, he tells him not to “waste his tears on Sibyl Vane” (Wilde 66). After talking to Lord Henry Dorian admits that the tragedy did not affect him as he thought it should. “It seems to me simply like a wonderful ending to a wonderful play” Dorian says (Wilde

65). Dorian tells Henry that he is his best friend and no one understands him as well as he does. Dorian feels like Harry knows him more than he knows himself: “You have explained me to myself, Harry” (Wilde 67). Dorian decides that they should not talk about this again and simply look at it as a “marvelous experience” (Wilde 67).

When Harry leaves, Dorian starts to feel as if he is at a crossroad. He has a choice to make between good and evil. “He felt that time had really come for making his choice. Or had his choice already been made? Yes, life had decided that for him – life, and his own infinite curiosity about life. Eternal youth, infinite passion, pleasure subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins – he was to have all these things” (Wilde 68). He wonders how life will be and how the portrait would change. For a moment he considers praying for this curse to end. After some time thinking about which way to go, Dorian puts a screen in front of the picture and walks away smiling (Wilde 68). Dorian is aware of his decision, he knows he is under the influence of Lord Henry and accepts it.

When Basil comes to console Dorian, he is shocked that Dorian does not feel sad about Sibyl’s death. He wonders how Dorian could go out and act like nothing had happened. Dorian says he does not want to be controlled by emotions: “A man who is master of himself can end a sorrow as easily as he can invent a pleasure. I don’t want to be at the mercy of my emotions. I want to use them, to enjoy them, and to dominate them” (Wilde 69). Basil is shocked, he says Dorian has changed and is no longer the Dorian he once knew and blames this change on Lord Henry. Dorian defends himself and his mentor, he says he owes more to Harry than he does to Basil, who only taught him to be vain. Dorian talks about how he has changed and of course he is no longer the same Dorian that Basil once knew, then he was a schoolboy and now he has become a man with new passions and ideas. He says that he is what he is, there is no changing him and he asks Basil not to fight him and accept that (Wilde 70-71). Dorian: “Of course I am very fond of Harry. But I know that you are better than he is. You are not stronger – you are too much afraid of life – but you are better. And how happy we used to be together! Don’t leave me, Basil, and don’t quarrel with me I am what I am. There is nothing more to be said” (Wilde 71). Basil hopes this is a phase Dorian is going through and believes he will move and be good again.

After hiding the portrait, Dorian regrets not telling Basil the real reason he didn’t want him to see the picture, he thinks “Basil would have helped him to resist Lord Henry’s

influence, and the still more poisonous influences that came from his own temperament, [...] it was too late now” (Wilde 76). Dorian goes on to live a hedonistic life of pleasure.

After murdering Basil, Dorian feels how corrupt he has become, he feels guilt and tries to push the emotion away. He knew his soul was “sick to death”, he knew he could not be forgiven so he tries to forget (Wilde 117). He remembers what Lord Henry had once said to him “To cure the soul by means of the senses, and the sense by means of the soul” (Wilde 117). Dorian decides to numb his guilt by visiting an opium den “where one could buy oblivion, dens of horror where the memory of old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new” (Wilde 117). Dorian feels that “life had suddenly become too hideous a burden for him to bear” (Wilde 131).

After escaping James Vane and his vengeance for his sister, Dorian feels as if he has gotten a second chance. Dorian decides he wants to change and be good. Dorian says he has done too many dreadful things and he is not going to do any more. Lord Henry tells Dorian that he is perfect as he is and there is no need for him to change (Wilde 133). Dorian says to Henry: “Don’t try to persuade me that the first good action I have done for years, the first little bit of self-sacrifice I have ever known, is really a sort of sin. I want to be better. I am going to be better” (Wilde 134).

Although Henry argues against him, Dorian believes that there is a soul in each person, “The soul is a terrible reality. It can be bought, and sold, and bartered away. It can be poisoned, or made perfect. There is a soul in each one of us. I know it (Wilde 136-137), and Dorian wants his soul to be good, he thinks that the only way for him to cleanse his sins is to confess, ”it was his duty to confess, to suffer public shame, and to make public atonement” (Wilde 141). Dorian starts questioning if Lord Henry is right in saying that he cannot change and become good. He is convinced that he can, he has already started to change. He goes to look at the portrait, hoping that the marks of cruelty had faded because of the good he has done, but, to his remorse, he sees that there is no change in the portrait.

“In this mood of remorse, combined with the realization that he cannot stop sinning, Dorian decides to kill his conscience by destroying the portrait that, to him, embodies his moral sense. When he acts on this desperate impulse, of course, he kills himself because he has been, all along, a child of both Henry and Basil, and, unlike either of his mentors, both a hearty sinner and a reluctant penitent” (Liebman).

3.2 Basil Hallward as the Force of Good

Basil Hallward represents good in the novel. He is a kind and good-hearted man who never speaks badly about anyone or anything and he believes in the good in people. “In his views of life and art, Basil Hallward is a moralist and an idealist, whose values are essentially middle class, consisting as they do of such criteria as honour, goodness, purity and a clean name, a fair record” (Kohl 154). Basil is a professional artist and therefore he highly values beauty. He values art over beauty, believing “there is nothing that Art cannot express” (Wilde 8), not even Dorian’s unbelievable beauty. Basil’s character corresponds with the Lord or the three angels in *Faust*. God is said to be all knowing and that can relate to Basil’s foreshadowing though out the novel. When he asks Lord Henry not to poison Dorian because he knew nothing good could come out of it (Wilde 11) and when he said that the god would make them suffer for their blessings. The blessings being Harry’s rank and wealth, Basil’s art and brains and Dorian’s beauty (Wilde 4).

When we first learn about Dorian Gray we get to know him through the eyes of Basil Hallward the artist who is painting Dorian’s portrait. It is obvious to the reader that Basil cares for Dorian by the way he speaks about him. Kohl mentions that Basil has become a father figure to Dorian (155); however many critics felt that there was another kind of love that Basil had for Dorian. One of the reasons the book was condemned as immoral when it came out was because it was said to display homosexual aspects between the two men.

From the beginning of the novel it is as if Basil realises the bad influence Lord Henry could have on Dorian, Basil: “Lord Henry, has a very bad influence over all his friends, with the single exception of myself “ (Wilde 12). Basil tries to prevent Henry from influencing Dorian:

Dorian Gray is my dearest friend, he has a simple and beautiful nature. Your aunt was quite right in what she said of him. Don’t spoil him. Don’t try to influence him. Your influence would be bad. The world is wide, and has many marvellous people in it. Don’t take away from me the one person who gives to

my art whatever charm it possesses; my life as an artist depends on him. Mind, Harry, I trust you. (Wilde 11)

In this passage Basil both proves his knowledge of the influence Lord Henry could have on Dorian and admits how much Dorian means to him and how much it would affect both his life and art if Dorian were to be spoiled by Lord Henry. However, he says to Lord Henry: “You never say a moral thing, and you never do a wrong thing. Your cynicism is simply a pose” (Wilde 5). This implies that Lord’s Henry hedonism is merely an act, still it is an act that gives him pleasure. Lord Henry of course breaks his promise not to spoil Dorian almost instantly. Dorian has become corrupted and his opinion is that Basil is to blame for the misery he has to suffer: “Basil had painted the portrait that had marred his life. He could not forgive him that” (Wilde 107). Dorian hopes to free his guilt by showing Basil the portrait. When Basil tells Dorian to pray and ask for forgiveness, he realizes that he cannot transfer the guilt and blame onto Basil:

Tormented by the reproaches, he feels like a ‘hunted animal’, and instinctively wishes to rid himself of his tormentor, that is of the man who in fact represents his own superego. And this is why Dorian kills Basil. Basil Hallward’s death results from the failure of his concept of life and art. His murder marks the climax of Dorian’s corruption, and it is presented with great psychological sensitivity (Kohl 155-156).

The main difference between the Lord in *Faust* and Basil is that the Lord gives Mephistopheles permission to try and tempt Faust while Basil asks Harry not to poison Dorian, on more than one occasion. And in *Job*, God is the one who makes the pact with the Devil.

When Basil hears rumours about Dorian’s corrupt behaviour he goes to see his friends and speak to him about it. Basil tells Dorian he has been hearing awful rumors about his behaviour and his influence on other people, he says Dorian has spoiled his friends: “One has a right to judge of a man by the effect he has over his friends. Yours seem to lose all sense of honour, of goodness, of purity. You have filled them with a madness for pleasure. They have gone down into the depths. You led them there”(Wilde 96). Dorian does not want to talk to Basil, he says he is not interested in scandals that

are about him, just ones about other people. Basil reminds Dorian that having money and a position is not as important as having a good reputation. Basil says to Dorian: “They must interest you, Dorian. Every gentle man is interested in his good name. You don’t want people to talk of you as something vile and degraded” (Wilde 94). Basil wants Dorian to change his and think about the consequences that his behaviour has on his reputation. Basil: “I want you to lead such a life as will make the world respect you. I want you to have a clean name and a fair record. I want you to get rid of the dreadful people you associate with. Don’t shrug your shoulders like that. Don’t be so indifferent. You have a wonderful influence. Let it be for good, not for evil” (Wilde 96).

Basil’s good nature can be seen through the fact that he never loses faith that Dorian can change his ways and become good again: “There was so much in him that was good, so much in him that was noble” His indifference was a mood that would pass away (Wilde 71). Basil says: “I want the Dorian Gray I used to paint” (Wilde 70). This is an unsuccessful attempt to hold on to the “moral perfection of the old Dorian; Basil is struggling against the inescapable fact that everything earthly is transient, and his words reflect his dependence on illusion, which prevents him from accepting the reality of Dorian’s life” (Kohl155). Basil’s faith in Dorian’s good nature corresponds with the Lord’s faith that Faust and Job will remain good and faithful servants. Job does remain faithful to God and gets rewarded for that. Sadly they are past a point of no return and the evil of Lord Henry and Mephistopheles triumphs over the good of Basil, the angels and the Lord.

3.3. The Devil figure in Dorian Gray: Lord Henry

Even though Dorian may blame his misery and terrible fate on the portrait and Basil, the creator of the portrait, the reader knows that it is actually Lord Henry Wotton who has the worst influence and is to blame for Dorian’s fate (Kohl 153,156). Lord Henry is often called Harry, Harry is a synonym for trouble and Old Harry is a name used for the Devil (Jünger 6; Dictionary.com l’Harry’; ‘Old Harry). Basil calls him Harry most of

the time, he introduces Harry as Lord Henry to Dorian and that is what Dorian calls him until after he gets to know Lord Henry and his hedonistic lifestyle. The narrator of the novel mostly refers to him as Lord Henry, however his aunt Agatha and uncle George call him Harry. The people who know him the best call him Harry, implying that they are aware of his corrupt thinking and bad influences. The relationship between Dorian and Lord Henry is very similar to the relationship between Faust and Mephistopheles: “Because you have the most marvellous youth, and youth is the one thing worth having”, says Lord Henry (Wilde 15). This sentence is the sentence that ultimately changes Dorian’s life. This sentence installs the fear of growing older and losing his beauty and causes him to make his wish, not knowing that it would come true. Dorian asked Lord Henry if he really did have a very bad influence as Basil said. Harry replied saying that there was no such thing as good influence. “All influence is immoral – immoral from the scientific point of view. Because to influence a person, is to give them one’s own soul. He does not have independent thoughts, or natural passions. His sins, if there is such a thing as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of some one else’s music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him.” Dorian falls under Lord Henry’s influence from their first meeting. “He was dimly conscious that entirely fresh influences were at work within him” and that it was the words of Lord Henry that were influencing him. His words “touched some secret chord that never been touched before” (Wilde 12-13).

Dorian says to the Duchess of Monmouth that Lord Henry is never wrong, and he always agrees with him (Wilde 125). Dorian does not start to change until after he meets Lord Henry. Lord Henry poisons Dorian’s mind with ideas of the pursuit or devotion to pleasure. Henry tells Dorian that there is no point in refusing his impulses or desires (Wilde 13). As Kohl points out there are many instances throughout the novel where Lord Henry guides Dorian in a certain direction (Kohl 156). “Dorian is the salve of another’s attitudes. Also, as Riquelme argues, “Dorian’s behaviour and his thinking are, by contrast, chosen for him, just as he chooses and manipulates the actions and thoughts of others” (621).

From their first meeting, Lord Henry starts influencing Dorian with ideas of new hedonism, which is the philosophy that Lord Henry lives by. He says to Dorian “live the wonderful life that is in you! Let nothing be lost upon you. Be always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of nothing” (Wilde 15-16). New hedonism is a philosophy

that believes pleasure to be the highest value in life. Lord Henry believes in self-fulfilment and that a person should never have to deny himself or herself anything, as “self-denial makes the soul sick” (Kohl 157). Dorian is extremely fascinated by these ideas and the character of Lord Henry. He is very tempted by Lord Henry’s influence and he cannot resist it. At the same time Dorian’s friendship with Basil is weakening (Kohl 143).

The first remarks of change in the portrait are seen after Dorian breaks off his engagement with Sibyl, when he knows he has done wrong and feels guilty. He realizes that his soul was turning evil and he could see it in the portrait. He wanted to be a good man. I know what conscience is, to begin with. “It is not what you told me it was. It is the divinest thing in us. Don’t sneer at it, Harry, any more – at least not before me. I want to be good. I can’t bear the idea of my soul being hideous” (Wilde 62). His plan was to reach out to Sibyl and honour his commitment to become her husband. When Dorian Gray learns from Lord Henry that his fiancée, Sibyl Vane, has committed suicide he feels guilty and terrible. Lord Henry encourages Dorian to ignore his guilt and move on and look at this as a learning experience (Wilde 64). “It is at this point in the action that Lord Henry’s Mephistophelean function becomes particularly clear. Instead of taking his friend seriously, he is all the more insistent on stylizing sibyl’s death to a sort of aesthetic spectacle, so that he can relieve Dorian of his responsibility for it” (Kohl 152). Often Dorian would sneak up to the locked room where he kept the portrait and spend a long time looking at it, “he grew more and more enamoured of his own beauty, more and more interested in the corruption of his own soul” (Wilde 82). When Dorian begins to gain pleasure from seeing the changes in his portrait, it becomes clear to the reader that Lord Henry’s influence on Dorian is taking control over him

When Harry first notices that his words have influenced Dorian, he smiles subtly and remembers a book he read when he was 16 years old (Wilde 14). This is early in the story, however Henry does not give Dorian the yellow book until much later. After Henry gives Dorian the book it absolutely takes over his life. The book becomes like a Bible or a road map of a hedonistic lifestyle to Dorian, who starts collecting copies of the yellow book. Dorian bases his life around the yellow book as some people base their life on the scriptures of the *Bible*. When Dorian first sees the book it is lying next to a copy of the St. James Gazette. “The St. James Gazette was one of the papers that called *The Picture of Dorian Gray* ‘stupid and vulgar’, and advised its readers to throw the

book in the fire” (Kohl 138). The novel was cast as immoral and poisonous by critics of the time. Oscar Wilde wrote in his preface: “There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written, that is all” (Wilde 2). Which is the same thing Lord Henry says to Dorian when Dorian accuses Lord Henry of poisoning him with the yellow book and asks him not to give it to anyone else (Wilde 138).

Under the guidance of Lord Henry and of the secret Yellow book, Dorian spends eighteen years enjoying all the opportunities open to a prosperous man of many interests, until finally vice and evil have become nothing but a means of experiencing intense sensual and aesthetic pleasures. (Kohl 144)

Dorian spends years seeking further pleasure, but after years of wanting more he can never be satisfied. He strives for instant gratification and does not think about the long-term effects his actions have. He lives a carefree libertine life. He is very self-centred and starts having bad influence on the people around him. Lord Henry is metaphorical Devil; his evil ways are made clear from the beginning of the novel. He intentionally influences Dorian and manages to persuade him to live a guilt free hedonistic life. Henry enjoys watching Dorian’s decline without suffering any consequences.

Lord Henry encourages Dorian to live a ‘life of sensual pleasure, while he himself enjoys looking on from a safe intellectual distance’. We do not get to know much about Lord Henry’s life, and although he does suggest much about his lifestyle, we have no proof. Herein lies the Mephistophelean aspect of his character. Dorian’s fatal error is to take Lord Henry’s theories as practical guides for life; he does not realize that in reality they represent the cynicism of a rich, bored and irresponsible idler, who finds that talking to Dorian is like playing upon an exquisite violin (Kohl 156).

Conclusion

God created the world in doubles and opposites. He made the opposite of good and evil however humans did not know about it until the serpent convinces Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The battle between good and evil is a common theme in literature, as well as a battle that still exists in the world today.

In his only Novel Oscar Wilde draws on different literary themes, sources and personal experience. The novel contains many themes, motifs and allusions. Wilde uses The Faustian bargain and the battle between good and evil, two very common literary themes. He uses the Faustian bargain to add emphasis on Dorian's dilemma of having to choose a position between Basil and Henry. His allusions to Biblical text and *Faust* make the battle fairly evident to the reader. Wilde uses the Faustian bargain and Biblical text to show the Basil and Lord Henry represent the opposite forces of good and evil and that Dorian represent the everyman struggling with that battle.

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